

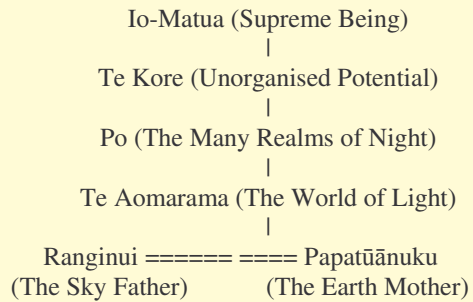
NGA ATUA - THE GODS

Introduction

The part that the gods play in the life of all Māori is hugely significant. All natural elements such as earthquakes, rain, wind and storms were attributed to the actions or emotions of the atua. The link is even more entrenched in tikanga as our whakapapa connects us with our ancestors and the gods themselves. The earth was respected as a mother and therefore entrenched in us to care for her. All of our food was a gift from the gods so they were constantly thanked and paid homage to through karakia (prayer).

In Te Ao Māori, life began with the atua so here; we too, begin with the creation mythology.

The Cosmic Genealogy



Te Timatanga – The Beginning

In the beginning there was Te Korekore, the darkness where there was potential but as yet no life. Within Te Korekore lived Io the Supreme Being, Io who created numerous realms of Po, the night. Then the darkness gave way to Te Ata the dawn, from which the primal parents Papatūānuku, the Earth Mother and Ranginui; the Sky Father came into being.

The firm embrace within which the parents held each other produced some seventy children all of whom became atua (gods). The children loved their parents but had to crawl between them and soon they yearned for space and light. The atua plotted to forcibly separate Papatūānuku and Ranginui with the task literally falling upon the shoulders of Tānemahuta, mighty god of the forests. At the moment Ranginui and Papatūānuku were parted the universe was created. All of the stars and planets came into being.

Papatūānuku wept so much for Ranginui that Io decided he would turn her over so that they did not have to face each other. So the rains and wind came to make the oceans rise so that Papatūānuku could be turned over to face the underworld. Her sons Rūaumoko - god of earthquakes and volcanoes, along with Whiro - the god of evil, chose to live within their mother. Whiro did not want light as he was warm within the embrace of his parents, nor did he agree with Tānemahuta being so prominent. So it was that Whiro would stay often collaborating with Tūmatauenga to cause arguments and disharmony among the descendants of Taane.

Nga Atua

The primal parents placed their children within the natural world where they established their own domains.

The following whakapapa describes the sequence of birth and domains of the eight children that were most prominent.

Ranginui === Papatūānuku

I

- (1) Tangaroa god of the seas, rivers, lakes and all the life within them
- (2) Tānemahuta god of the forest and all that dwell within them, especially the birds
- (3) Tāwhirimatea god of the winds and of storms
- (4) Rongo Mā Tāne god of the kumara and all cultivated foods. Also the god of peace
- (5) Haumiatiketike guardian spirit of wild food
- (6) Rūaumoko god of earthquakes and volcanoes
- (7) Tūmatauenga god of man and war
- (8) Whiro god of evil

Papatūānuku Personified

In Te Ao Māori (the world of the Māori) the entire earth is known as Papatūānuku the earth mother. Whether this is in her physical representation as the earth or within our consciousness of her as a spiritual being or through all her mokopuna that dwell upon her (all flora and fauna are her grandchildren, the children of her offspring e.g. all the birds and insects of the forest are referred to as the children of Tānemahuta). All life depends upon Papatūānuku for their wellbeing. People have the option of caring for her to maintain their own health or abandoning her to concentrate on their own short term needs. Ultimately an unhealthy Papatūānuku is going to lead to unhealthy people. By always keeping in mind the needs of Papatūānuku and the requirements of her immediate whanau our people were able to appreciate what would happen to the land (and them) if it was not kept in as natural a state as was possible. They only needed to look as far as their own bodies to understand how the earth would react if either were not looked after properly.

From here in the Wairarapa Valley our kaumātua tell us to take a close look at the skin on our body. We can see that it is neither smooth nor flat. Our skin is like the land, rising and falling like the peaks and valleys. The elders say look at the Tararua Ranges high above us, then to see how the mountains descend to the flat plains in the valleys only to rise again in the east on the Weraiti Hills. This is the land, it is Papatūānuku, the land and our skin are very similar.

They then say to look at the hair that covers our bodies, the covering that keeps us warm and provides protection just like the grasses and trees upon the earth. It does not take long to begin to understand what the kaumātua are impressing upon us. They remind us that Tānemahuta covered his mother in a cloak of trees and plants to keep her warm; in her cloak he placed his children to accompany her. The kaumātua say “look at the hills that have no cloak, Papatūānuku’s skin is left unprotected, it will become dry and it will fall away.” Our skin peels after too much sun, it is the same as with Papatūānuku, but we call this erosion.

Next they ask if we know the purpose of the arteries, veins and capillaries in the human body, to which we are able to say yes. These vessels carry the blood and oxygen or the ‘life-force’ around the body. They contain the anti-bodies that purify our blood. They then ask us to think of Papatūānuku as a human again. The waterways that cover Papatūānuku acts in a similar fashion. They provide the nutrients and water to the soils, plants and animals. They cleanse the land of impurities by washing them out to sea. They transport the gravels washed down from the mountains into the rivers and further out to sea.

The Ruamahanga River is the main artery from which all the other rivers such as the Waipoua, Waingawa, Taueru and Whangaehu enter. These rivers are in turn fed by the many creeks and streams just the same as the veins in the human body.

Part of this learning was to consider the effects of sickness upon our bodies and then translate these illnesses to Papatūānuku. It was soon apparent that she too was vulnerable to the whole range of health problems experienced by mankind. Among many other illnesses her veins became blocked as in the case of slips or debris gathering in rivers such as seen during the storms of February 2004 and her blood could be poisoned as when pollutants find their way into the waterways. The only time she has a good clean out is when it rains or during storms. If people wanted their mother to care for them then they had to minimise the risk of her becoming sick. Sometimes the elements (her children) combine to help their mother, in so doing they flush away the paru (dirt), processes that man has no control over and should perhaps be resigned to accepting as being a part of the earth.



Tawhai – New Zealand Silver Beech

Hine Nui Te Po

One day the atua decided they would create a woman and so gathered the red clay called *kurawaka* from the body of their mother. Tānemahuta fashioned the shape of the woman in the image of the Mareikura, wives of the Whatukura – guardians of the heavens. To this shape, Tānemahuta's brothers added muscles, flesh and fat. After all this was done Io sent Rehua, the head guardian of the Whatukura with five things. These were toto (blood), wai (water), wairua (spirit), manawa (heart) and hau (breath), the five principles in the creation of life.

Finally, Tānemahuta bent over the lifeless form and breathed into its nostrils. The woman's chest rose and then she took her first breath, "Tihei". All of the atua were pleased with the woman so they gave her the gift of life – "Mauriora".

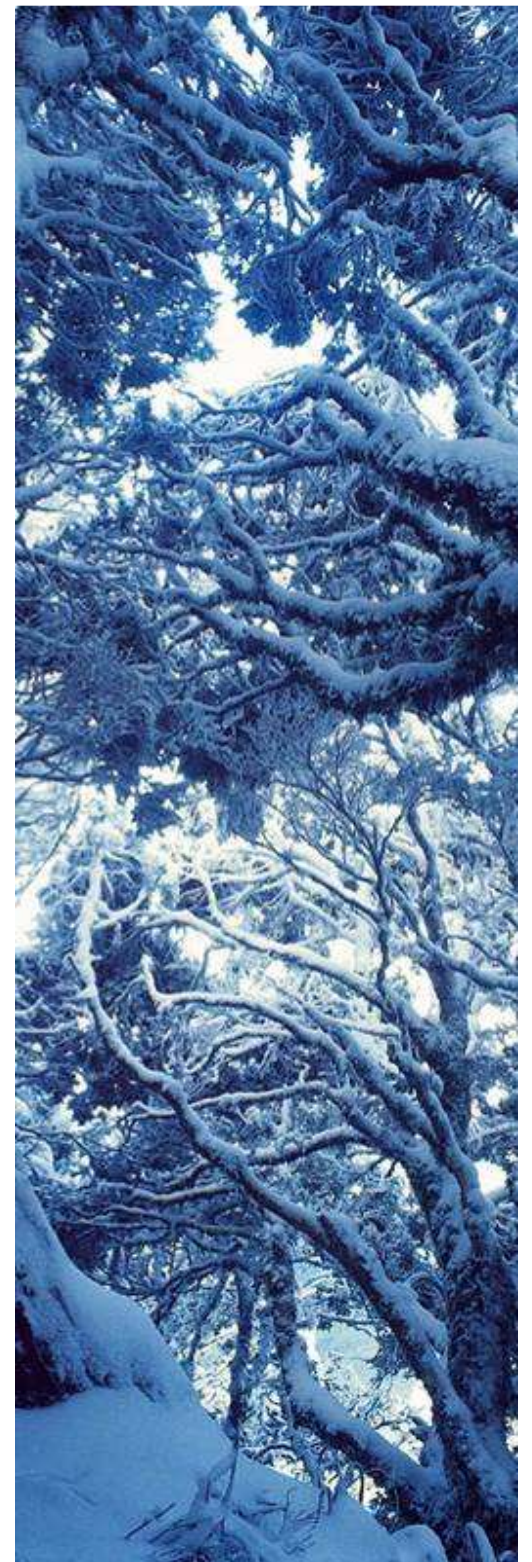
The first woman was called Hineahuone – *woman made of earth*. Io decided that it was time that the atua and Hineahuone should receive a gift that would help humankind in their quest for knowledge. He sent Rehua to the atua inviting one of them to climb to the highest of the twelve heavens to receive the three baskets of knowledge. Whiro volunteered but the others chose Tānemahuta. Tāne reached the 11th heaven when he was attacked by the pepetua – the hoarding insect children of Whiro but Tāwhirimatea sent his children the winds to protect Tāne. Tāne eventually reached Tikitikiorangi – the 12th and highest heaven where upon he was blessed before receiving the three baskets of knowledge.

The first kete (kete tuari) contained all of the ritual chants needed to converse with Ranginui, Papatūānuku and their offspring. These were the ancient karakia that allowed man to ask the deities to control the weather so that conditions would be favourable to grow or gather foods.

The second kete (kete tuatea) was the basket of evil that which contained all the bad things to know.

The third kete (kete aronui) had in it all the good things to know. These included positive human emotions as well as the teaching of all those practices that benefit humankind. This knowledge pertained to the earth, land, water, animals, birds, fish, insects and food.

Tānemahuta and Hineahuone had a daughter named Hinetitama – child of the first morning light. When Hinetitama was a young woman the gods pondered as to whom she should marry. None of them could agree upon an answer so the task was again left in the hands of Tānemahuta. He decided to turn himself into a normal man to disguise his true identity. Not knowing whom this stranger was Hinetitama immediately fell in love with him and they produced children. One day Hinetitama discovered that her husband was also her father and so ran away. She fled to the underworld to be with her grandmother Papatūānuku. She told Tānemahuta that she would welcome the spirits of their descendants and at the same time protect them from Whiro who wished to consume their souls. At the same time she told her husband he could never come near her again thereby creating the rahui or the space where Tānemahuta could no longer enter. Hinetitama became known as Hine-Nui-Te-Po, the goddess of death.



Snow in tree canopy

Te Ika a Maui

Maui Tiki a Taranga, Maui the coiled hair of Taranga (Taranga being his mother) the mischievous demi-god, caught Te Ika a Maui, the fish of Maui which is now known as the North Island of New Zealand. The fish was the shape of a giant stingray whose tail is in Muriwhenua (North Cape) with the wings extending to the eastern and western extremities of the island. In the Wairarapa the places associated with Te Ika a Maui are:

- Wairarapa Moana – Lake Wairarapa – This is known as ‘Te Whatu o Te Ika a Maui’ or ‘the eye of the fish of Maui’. This is the freshwater eye, the other eye is Wellington Harbour or Te Whanganui a Tara which is the saltwater eye.
- Kawakawa – Palliser Bay is known as ‘Te Waha o Te Ika a Maui’ or ‘the mouth of the fish of Maui’.
- Turakirae Head and Matakītaki a Kupe (Cape Palliser) are known as ‘the jaws of the fish’
- The combined Rimutaka, Tararua and Ruahine ranges that pass up the middle of the North Island are referred to as ‘the spine of the fish’
- The Tararua Mountain Range Lake called Hapuakorari is known as ‘the pulse of the fish’.

Below is an old whakatauki that names these very places.

“Te tuara ko Ruahine, nga kanohi ko Whanganui a Tara, tetahi kanohi ko Wairarapa, te kauae runga ke Te Kawakawa, tetahi kauae ko Turakirae”.

“The back is the Ruahine ranges, with regard to the eyes, the salt water one is Wellington Harbour the other eye - the fresh water one - is Lake Wairarapa, the upper jaw is Cape Palliser and the lower jaw is Turakirae Head”

(Source: Riley 1990: 78-4)



The photo to the right shows Kawakawa (Palliser Bay) or ‘the mouth of the fish of Maui’. Turakirae Head is at the top left of the picture (noted as one of the jaws of the fish)

Quick quiz – Nga Atua

1. Who is referred to as the Supreme Being?
2. Who succeeded in separating Papa and Rangi?
3. They had over how many children? 60, 70 or 80?
4. There were 8 primary gods, who were they and what were their domains? e.g. Tāwhirimātea – god of the winds;
5. What was the name of the first woman? What does her name mean?
6. How many baskets of knowledge were there? Name them?

Answers at the back of booklet

Key Points

- Māori have their own creation mythology;
- There are a multitude of ‘departmental gods’ each with their own domain; and
- The first human was Hineahuone, a woman. This is acknowledged in Māori tikanga today when the karanga or female call is the first sound to be heard on a marae when welcoming visitors.